

What is claimed is:

1. A vehicle sharing system, comprising:

5 at least one port including a parking space and a terminal for accepting a request to use a vehicle; and

a control center including a computer unit for processing said request and allocating a vehicle to each request;

wherein said request includes an estimated distance and time duration of an intended trip.

10 2. A vehicle sharing system, according to claim 1, wherein said terminal

includes a display of a map of a serviced area, and said estimated distance of an intended trip is indicated by selection of a zone defined in said map.

15 3. A vehicle sharing system, according to claim 2, wherein each shared

vehicle is provided with a GPS which provides location information to a vehicle operator according to the selection of the zone when making the request.

20 4. A vehicle sharing system, according to claim 1, wherein said terminal

includes a display device and is programmed to display the identity of the allocated vehicle.

25 5. A vehicle allocation system for allocating one or more vehicles from a fleet of

vehicles to one or more users, the vehicle allocation system comprising:

one or more ports at geographically remote locations relative to each other, each port having a user interface terminal for receiving user-input information;

at least one central station computer system coupled for communication with the user interface terminal at each port for receiving user-input information from any of said user interface terminals, wherein said at least one central station computer system is programmed to select and allocate a vehicle from the fleet in response to receiving user-input information from a user, said selection being based on the received user-input information.

6. A system as recited in claim 5, wherein each user-interface terminal comprises a display device for displaying a map to the user and a user-display interface for receiving user-selected map locations corresponding to locations on the displayed map from a user.

5 7. A system as recited in claim 5, wherein each user-interface terminal comprises:  
a computer programmed to control the display device to display a map with at least one of predefined zones and map locations; and  
a user interface device for allowing a user to select at least one of the predefined zones and locations.

10 8. A system as recited in claim 7, wherein said user interface device comprises at least one of a touch-screen, a keyboard, or a cursor controller.

9. A system as recited in claim 5, wherein each port includes a display device to display the identity of the allocated vehicle to a user that inputs request information.

10. A vehicle allocation system as recited in claim 5, wherein said user-input information comprises time of use information corresponding to a time period for which the user desires to use one of the vehicles from the fleet of vehicles.

20 11. A vehicle allocation system as recited in claim 5, wherein said user-input information comprises distance information corresponding to a distance which the user desires to travel with one of the vehicles from the fleet of vehicles.

25 12. A vehicle allocation system as recited in claim 11, wherein said user-input information further comprises time of use information corresponding to a time period for which the user desires to use one of the vehicles from the fleet of vehicles.

13. A vehicle allocation system as recited in claim 10, wherein said user-input information further includes destination port information for identifying the port at which the user desires as a destination and wherein said time of use information and said distance information comprise information corresponding to the time and distance beyond the time and distance required to reach the destination port.

14. A vehicle allocation system as recited in claim 11, wherein said user-input information further includes destination port information for identifying the port at which the user desires as a destination and wherein said time of use information and said distance information comprise information corresponding to the time and distance beyond the time and distance required to reach the destination port.

15. A vehicle allocation system as recited in claim 12, wherein said user-input information further includes destination port information for identifying the port at which the user desires as a destination and wherein said time of use information and said distance information comprise information corresponding to the time and distance beyond the time and distance required to reach the destination port.

16. A vehicle allocation system as recited in claim 5, wherein the vehicles in the fleet of vehicles are electric powered and each vehicle defines a state of charge (SOC) at any given time, the vehicle allocation system further comprising:

20 a plurality of vehicle computer systems associated on a one-to-one basis with the vehicles from the pool of vehicles, each vehicle computer system including means for detecting the SOC of its associated vehicle and for communicating a detected SOC to said at least one central station computer;

25 wherein said at least one central station computer system is programmed to further base the selection of a vehicle on the detected SOCs of any vehicles located within the VSG of a port from which user-input information is received.

17. A vehicle allocation system as recited in claim 5, wherein:  
each port has a vehicle search group (VSG) in which more than one and less than all of  
the vehicle from the fleet may be located at any given time; and  
said central station computer is programmed to select and allocate a vehicle from the  
VSG of the port from which user-input information is received.

18. A system as recited in claim 17, wherein each port includes a vehicle parking  
facility at which one or more vehicles may be parked at any given time and the VSG of a given  
port includes vehicles parked at a parking facility at the port.

19. A system as recited in claim 18, wherein the VSG of a given port further includes  
vehicles due to arrive at the port within a preset time period.

20. A method for allocating one or more vehicles from a fleet of vehicles to one or  
more users, the method comprising:

providing at least one port terminal, each having a user interface for receiving vehicle  
requests from users;  
receiving a request for a vehicle at one of said port terminals from one of said users, said  
request including user-input information;  
communicating the user-input information to a central computer system;  
selecting a vehicle from the fleet and allocating the vehicle to the request, said selection  
being based, at least in part, on the user-input information received at that port terminal.

21. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein said step of providing at least one port  
terminal comprises locating a plurality of port terminals at geographically remote locations  
relative to each other, wherein each port terminal is coupled for communication with the central  
computer system.

22. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein said step of receiving a request for a vehicle comprises:

displaying a map to the user; and

5 receiving user-selected map locations corresponding to locations on the displayed map through a user-interface associated with the displayed map.

23. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein said step of receiving a request for a vehicle comprises:

10 displaying a map with at least one of predefined zones and map locations; and

receiving user-selected zone or map locations through a user interface device.

24. A method as recited in claim 23, wherein said user interface device comprises at least one of a touch-screen, a keyboard, or a cursor controller.

25. A method as recited in claim 20, further comprising the step of displaying the identity of a selected vehicle on a display device at the port terminal, to inform the user of the selected vehicle.

20 26. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein said user-input information comprises time of use information corresponding to a time period for which the user desires to use one of the vehicles from the fleet.

25 27. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein said user-input information comprises distance information corresponding to a distance which the user desires to travel with one of the vehicles from the fleet.

28. A method as recited in claim 27, wherein said user-input information further comprises time of use information corresponding to a time period for which the user desires to use one of the vehicles from the fleet of vehicles.

29. A method as recited in claim 26, wherein said user-input information further includes destination port information for identifying the port at which the user desires as a destination and wherein said time of use information and said distance information comprise information corresponding to the time and distance beyond the time and distance required to reach the destination port.

10 30. A method as recited in claim 27, wherein said user-input information further includes destination port information for identifying the port at which the user desires as a destination and wherein said time of use information and said distance information comprise information corresponding to the time and distance beyond the time and distance required to reach the destination port.

15 31. A method as recited in claim 28, wherein said user-input information further includes destination port information for identifying the port at which the user desires as a destination and wherein said time of use information and said distance information comprise information corresponding to the time and distance beyond the time and distance required to reach the destination port.

20 32. A method as recited in claim 20, wherein the vehicles in the fleet of vehicles are electric powered and each vehicle defines a state of charge (SOC) at any given time, the method further comprising detecting the SOC of vehicles in the fleet of vehicles and wherein said step of selecting a vehicle based on the user-input information received at the port terminal comprises further basing the selection on the detected SOCs of the vehicles.

25 33. A method as recited in claim 20, further comprising:  
defining a vehicle search group (VSG) for the port terminal at which user-input information is received from a user, wherein more than one and less than all of the vehicle from the fleet may be located in the VSG at any given time;  
wherein said step of selecting a vehicle from the fleet comprises selecting a vehicle from the VSG of the port at which user-input information is received from a user.

34. A method as recited in claim 33, wherein the VSG of any given port terminal includes vehicles parked at a parking facility at the port terminal.

35. A method as recited in claim 33, wherein the VSG of any given port terminal further includes vehicles due to arrive at the port terminal within a preset time period.